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Local groups oppose voter ID bill

By [Stephanie Wang](#) | Friday, January 16, 2009, 03:01 PM

A coalition of 14 public interest and civil rights organizations denounced voter identification requirements Friday in response to a rules change the Texas Senate approved earlier this week that will allow a vote on such a bill.

The upcoming legislation is "a solution for a problem that doesn't exist" in Texas, said Luis Figueroa, legislative staff attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Requiring a photo ID at the polls would affect the elderly, disabled and poor, creating unnecessary barriers to voting and violating a basic fundamental right, Figueroa said.

In other states, voting laws make room for provisions or exemptions that help those without ID to still cast their ballots, he said.

The coalition also spoke out against what it called the manipulation of power in the Senate, where the rule change Wednesday paved the way for the voter ID bill to reach a vote with the approval of 16 of the 31 senators. In the past, the bill would have needed a two-thirds majority to come to a vote (the rules change approved Wednesday affected only voter ID).

With 19 Republicans and 12 Democrats in the Senate, the move has been seen as a partisan fight that will keep Democrats from blocking key issues.

"Any legislative initiative should succeed or fail based on its own merits, not because someone had to change the rules to make it happen," said Andy Wilson, spokesman for Public Citizen.

"Process and rulemaking is the difference between Oklahoma and Texas going to the national BCS championship," he quipped.

Other organizations participating in the press conference included local branches of the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Missing from the collaboration was the League of Women Voters, a group that felt the controversy was an internal matter for the Senate, Figueroa said.

It isn't uncommon for organizations to unite in expressing opinions on legislation, but the diversity of the groups represented was an indicator of the importance of the issue, Wilson said.

In the previous session, it was the Senate that had blocked the proposed voter ID bill. Now organizations will have to look to the House of Representatives and the committee process for support in defeating it, Figueroa said.